

Living 50+



How empty nesters can overcome boredom

(StatePoint Media)

Raising children is a significant responsibility. Parents know there's no such thing as a day off, which is why the first day they come home to an empty nest can be so confounding.

After roughly two busy and likely hectic decades or more of looking after their children, parents whose sons or daughters have left home for the first time may experience feelings of sadness and loss. That's not unusual, as the Mayo Clinic notes it's a phenomenon known as "empty nest syndrome." Though it's not a clinical diagnosis, empty nest syndrome can be a difficult hurdle to overcome, especially for parents who find themselves suddenly bored after years of being so busy. Empty nesters looking to banish boredom can consider these strategies.

■ Give your home a new

look. Parents go to great lengths to make their homes welcoming safe havens for their children. Moms and dads often joke that, between play rooms and study areas, kids get the bulk of the real estate under their roofs. Now that the children have moved out, parents can take back that space and refresh their homes. A home that's adapted for empty nesters will look quite different from one designed for families with young children. So a renovation or redesign can provide plenty of work that can fill idle time and instill a sense of excitement about the future.

■ Become a weekend road warrior. Newly minted empty nesters are likely still working full-time. But now that there's no soccer practices or band recitals taking up valuable real estate on your weekend schedule, Saturdays and Sundays can pro-

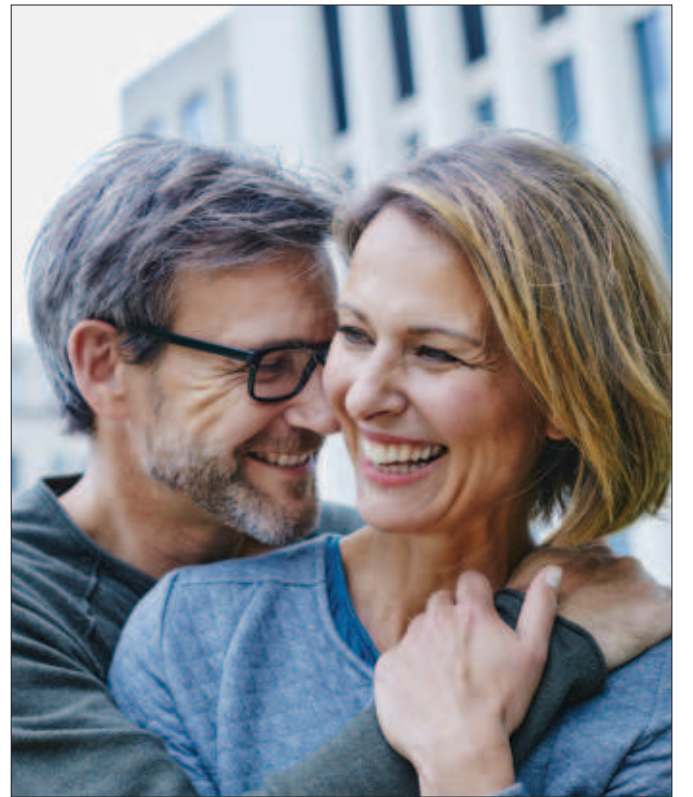
vide perfect opportunities to travel. Plan routine weekend getaways, choosing different locales for each trip. Visit a city one weekend and devote a subsequent trip to the great outdoors.

■ Reconnect with old friends. Some individuals experiencing empty nest syndrome may be hesitant to admit they're experiencing feelings of sadness and loneliness. But a recent Sky Mobile study of parents of teenagers in England found that 47 percent were fretting about having an empty nest. So it's likely that old friends and fellow parents are experiencing feelings associated with empty nest syndrome. Reaching out to old friends is a great way to reconnect and can provide an outlet to discuss feelings parents might be hesitant to share with others. But empty nesters who experience significant feelings of sadness and loneli-

ness are urged to speak with a health care professional as well.

■ Replace kids' activities with your own. After years of toting kids from one extracurricular activity to another, empty nesters can now do the same for themselves. Visit local community centers and libraries and ask about classes for adults. Many offer classes on everything from crafts to sports. Adults also can research continuing education programs at local colleges and universities if they're interested in a career change or pursuing an advanced degree for personal enrichment.

Newly minted empty nesters can look at their empty nest as an opportunity to engage in activities that pique their interests after years of catering to the needs and wants of their children.



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Social media: It's not just for kids anymore

(StatePoint Media)

Perhaps due to the popularity of social media among a generation of young people who grew up with it, platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are often associated with people born in the 21st century. However, a 2018 study from the Pew Institute found that 65 percent of adults between the ages of 50 and 64 used Facebook and 68 percent used YouTube.

Social media is often on the receiving end of negative attention, but it's also a potentially valuable tool that can help men and women over 50 stay connected with their communities. That's not always so easy for adults who no longer have children at home. And as its name suggests, social media can

help users connect with others who share their interests. Such connections also can be hard to make for adults over 50.

Adults over 50 may be more comfortable with social media now than they were a decade ago, but it's still a good idea to brush up on basic security measures that can help men and women protect their privacy as they utilize platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

- Protect your personal information. No social media user has the right to access your personal information, including your address, date of birth or other data unique to you. Avoid interacting with anyone who requests personal information, employing the function to block such users from connect-

ing with you when possible. It's also important to keep information about travel plans private. For example, sharing details of an upcoming vacation can serve notice to potential criminals that no one will be in your house, making it a potential target for burglars.

- Aim for quality, not quantity, when building social media networks. Avoid accepting friend requests from individuals you don't know. Cyber criminals often gain access to victims via social media, so limit your social media network to people you know and trust.

- Turn off location information. The technology behind social media is impressive and even makes it possible to determine where users are when they tweet or post to other platforms.

But many users, especially those concerned about their privacy, don't want to share location information with anyone, much less strangers. Turn off location information and routinely double check to make sure it's still turned off.

- Discuss others' privacy concerns before posting to social media. Social media isn't for everyone, and some people may not want photos of themselves or their children posted to platforms like Facebook or Instagram. Prior to posting pictures or information about other people, confirm that they're OK with you doing so.

Adults over 50 are engaging with social media. But no matter how comfortable users become, it's still best to keep various social media safety protocols in mind.



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How seniors can approach exercise



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(StatePoint Media)

Exercise is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. By making exercise part of their day-to-day routines, people of all ages, including men and women over the age of 65, can greatly improve their overall health.

The American Academy of Family Physicians notes that seniors should aspire to be as active as possible. Exercise is a great way to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine and has been linked to reduced risk for diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Though adults with chronic illnesses may be hesitant to exercise, the AAFP notes that it's possible for men and women who have been diagnosed with such conditions to exercise safely. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that regular physi-

cal activity is one of the most important things seniors can do for their health and can potentially prevent many health problems associated with aging.

FREQUENCY OF EXERCISE

Seniors, particularly those who have not exercised much in the past, may not know how much exercise they need to reap the full rewards of physical activity. Though it's best to discuss exercise with a physician prior to beginning a new regimen, various public health agencies advise seniors to get at least 2.5 hours of moderate aerobic exercise each week. Brisk walking is one example of moderate aerobic exercise. Seniors who want to sweat a little more when exercising can replace moderate aerobic exercise with one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous exercise, such as jogging, each week.

IS STRENGTH TRAINING SAFE FOR SENIORS?

The CDC advises seniors to incorporate muscle-strengthening activities into their weekly fitness routines twice per week. Lifting weights, working with resistance bands, heavy gardening, and even some forms of yoga qualify as muscle-strengthening activities. Exercises that use your body weight for resistance, such as sit-ups and push-ups, also can help build strength. Always speak with a physician before beginning a muscle-strengthening exercise regimen and, if possible, work with a personal trainer, especially if you're a novice.

Exercise can help seniors stay healthy and feel more energetic throughout the day. Before beginning a new regimen, seniors should discuss physical activity with their physicians.

WHEN TO STOP A WORKOUT

It's imperative that seniors recognize when to stop working out. Exercising more than is recommended by your doctor can increase the risk of illness or injury. In addition, stop exercising if any of the following symptoms appear:

- Dizziness or shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Swollen joints
- Nausea
- Tightness in muscles or joints
- Pain anywhere in the body
- Throbbing or burning sensations

Age is no deterrent when it comes to academics



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(StatePoint Media)

Students often experience some jitters on the first day of school, but the prospect of such nervousness doesn't appear to be too great a deterrent for students 60 and older. Officials at Toronto's York University estimated they had around 430 students aged 60 and older in undergraduate and graduate programs in 2021. Increased enrollment among people at or nearing what is often considered retirement age could be a reflection of what the AARP notes has been an increase in continuing education courses at many colleges and universities. Such courses may be offered to individuals of a certain age at reduced tuition. They also can help workers over 50 learn new skills that can benefit them in an ever-adapting professional landscape that increasingly relies on tech-

nologies that may not have been around when older professionals attended college and began their careers. In addition, the AARP reports that individuals interested in going back to school for personal enrichment, as opposed to achieve an ad-

vanced degree, may be able to audit classes for free. In such instances, older adults often do not receive academic credit but still get to benefit from taking the class.

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How to make new friends after 50

(StatePoint Media)

The early years of midlife are a hectic time for many people. Around the time many people reach their late 30s and early 40s, they're balancing the responsibilities of a career and a family. But as people enter their 50s, some of those responsibilities tend to be less significant, leaving more time for recreational pursuits.

Hobbies and other pursuits outside of work are often more fun when enjoyed with friends. People over 50 undoubtedly recognize that it's not always so easy to make new friends, even though it's undeniably beneficial to have supportive relationships into your golden years. A 2017 study from researchers at Michigan State University found that valuing friendships was a stronger predictor of health and happiness among older adults than valuing family. Those results align with an earlier Australian study that

found Australians age 70 or older tended to live significantly longer if they had more strong friendships.

Making friends after 50 might not be as simple as it was during your school days, but these strategies can help men and women in midlife build new friendships.

- **Identify your interests.** Fiftysomethings who have spent the last couple of decades building a career and raising a family can give some serious thought to their interests outside of work or passions they hope to pursue now that they have more time to commit to such pursuits. The more interested you are in a given activity, the more likely you are to stick with it. And the longer you stick with something, the more likely you are to meet like-minded individuals (i.e., future friends) willing to make similar commitments.

- **Utilize social media.** In years past, men and women over 50 may not have had

any readily available tools to reach out and connect with new people. Social media has made it much easier to build such connections. Even the most obscure passions likely have a social media group of locals devoted to them, and these groups can be great ways to meet new people. A local runner's club may have its own social media accounts, and local governments and community groups often share information about sports leagues and other groups via social media.

- **Sign up for group outings.** Communities often sponsor group outings to museums, the theater, sporting events, and other day trips. Signing up for a bus trip to a local museum presents a great opportunity to meet people who share your interests, providing the potential to build lasting friendships built on a foundation of shared interests.

- **Broaden your horizons.**



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Just because you're in your 50s doesn't mean your friends have to be. Don't hesitate to invite younger or older acquaintances and colleagues over for dinner or on weekend excursions. Friends

come in all shapes, sizes and ages, so you could be missing out if you're not willing to extend a hand in friendship to people of different ages and backgrounds. Making friends after 50

can be challenging. However, various strategies can help men and women over 50 connect with new people.

What to do about wellness after 50

Reaching one's fiftieth birthday in optimal health is an accomplishment to be proud of. The hard work required to be healthy in midlife includes adhering to a nutritious diet and exercising regularly. Once individuals cross the threshold and enter their 50s, they can look to some additional strategies to maintain their physical and mental well-being for decades to come.

- **Get a pet.** Many people 50 and older qualify as "empty nesters," a term applied to adults whose children have grown up and moved out of their homes. Some empty nesters experience a phenomenon known as "empty nest syndrome," which the Mayo Clinic notes

can be marked by feelings of sadness or loss. Pets can help people over 50 with no children at home overcome feelings linked to empty nest syndrome. In 2018, the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging found that 86 percent of pet owners felt their pets make them feel loved while 73 percent said their pets provided a sense of purpose. Pets also can ensure individuals over 50 stay physically active and provide opportunities to connect with other people.

- **Prioritize learning.** Whether it's taking music lessons, going back to school or mastering a new hobby, learning has a profound effect on aging brains. For example, a 2013 study

published in the journal Psychological Science found that memory function is improved by engagement in demanding everyday tasks. That study reported that people who learned new skills experienced greater memory improvement than people who only socialized or participated in activities that were not as cognitively engaging.

- **Make an effort to improve balance.** Various factors contribute to a decline in balance as adults age. For example, a decline in muscle mass that begins when people are in their 30s is a normal part of aging. Over time, that natural decline affects strength and agility. Balance exercises can be a valuable

component of a fitness regimen that help individuals reduce their risk for falling as they advance through their 50s and into their 60s and 70s. That's a significant benefit, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that one out of every three adults age 65 and older experiences a fall each year, and as many as 30 percent of those falls lead to serious injury.

- **Embrace your inner socialite.** Socialization is important for people of all ages, including individuals 50 and over. A 2017 study from researchers at Michigan State found that valuing friendships was a strong predictor of health and happiness among older adults.



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Opportunities to socialize with friends may increase as people navigate their 50s and children move out or become more independent. Individuals can take advantage of opportunities to socialize

whenever possible. Various strategies can help people maintain mental and physical wellness as they make their way through their 50s and beyond.



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